

Rotavirus infection

Disease Fact Sheet Series

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus that causes diarrhea among persons in all age groups, but is most common among children between 6 months and 2 years old. Infants less than 3 months old rarely develop diarrhea from rotavirus infection. Since rotavirus infection is not a reportable disease in Wisconsin, the specific incidence is unknown.

What are the symptoms of rotavirus infection?

Symptoms of rotavirus infection include watery diarrhea, usually preceded or accompanied by vomiting and a low-grade fever. Severe dehydration may occur in young children. Symptoms typically last from 4-6 days.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms appear 1-3 days after a person is infected with rotavirus.

What is the treatment for rotavirus infections?

No specific treatment for rotavirus infection is available. Oral rehydration or intravenous fluids may be needed for severe cases. Antibiotics and antimotility drugs such as Lomotil® or Imodium®, used to control diarrhea should not be used.

How are rotavirus infections spread?

The virus is spread through the ingestion of water or food contaminated with feces from an infected person. Inanimate objects such as toys and other surfaces contaminated with feces from an infected person have also been identified as a mechanism for spreading the virus. The virus can occasionally be spread in discharges from the nose or throat.

For how long is an infected person able to spread rotavirus?

Individuals with rotavirus infection may shed the virus in the stool for as long as 10 days after the onset of symptoms.

(Over)

How can rotavirus infection be prevented?

Strict adherence to good hand washing techniques and the proper disposal of contaminated wastes (including diapers) are effective in preventing the spread of the disease. Environmental surfaces contaminated with rotavirus should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a bleach solution. Disinfectants other than bleach are not effective against rotavirus. Children with diarrhea should not attend day care until the diarrhea has stopped.

Does past infection make a person immune?

By age three most individuals have acquired some immunity to rotavirus-associated disease. Although reinfection with rotavirus may occur, the infected person usually does not develop symptoms.